

### 423 Patient Perspective on the Use of the Independent Sector to Maintain Elective NHS Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Introduction:** COVID-19 resulted in the suspension of planned treatments for patients worldwide leaving millions suffering the physical and mental effects of delay. Reports indicate that when services have been re-established, patients have been afraid to take up appointments. Hospitals put processes in place to counter this, notably separating emergency and elective patient cohorts. Most notably seen by the co-operation between the NHS and independent private healthcare providers in March 2020 at the height of the pandemic. We undertook a study to ascertain the perceptions of NHS patients who underwent elective treatment at independent 'cold' sites during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Method:** A cross-sectional study with structured telephone interviews of patients who had planned elective treatments at 'cold' independent hospitals between March and September 2020. 1150 patients were identified, and a 20% sample formed a 230 patient study group, with 158 (70%) agreeing to participate.

**Results:** 30% of patients delayed their treatment due to COVID related concerns, with 76% of these only accepting treatment because this was at a 'cold' site. 46% of patients perceived treatment at a 'cold' site as the most important factor contributing to their safety. 153 patients (97%) supported the paid arrangement between the NHS and the independent sector to provide separate 'cold' sites for elective treatments.

**Discussion:** Safely restarting elective services to allow important planned treatments to take place, as was the pandemic continues, is a priority. Our study indicates that physical separation of patient pathways impacted most on patient confidence, and that the use of 'cold' sites is a viable option.